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ABSTRACT

This report describes alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use among 715 University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) students. The report focuses on drug use at the higher frequency levels, rather than reporting proportions who have ever used various drugs. The separate classes of drugs distinguished are alcohol, tobacco, cocaine, marijuana, and non-prescription "stay-awake" pills. The study investigated such issues as drinking to get drunk; driving after using drugs or alcohol; riding with a driver who has used drugs or alcohol; and drug/alcohol possession, consumption, and intoxication on campus. In addition to analyzing use, the report addresses negative consequences of drinking, perceptions of close friends concerning alcohol and drug use, perceived risk of becoming an alcoholic, and personal knowledge of alcohol and drugs. It is concluded that, although UNO students are well below the national average in terms of drug use, the problem of alcohol abuse is of disturbing proportions, with heavy alcohol use accepted as normal consumption. (Seven references.) (JDD)

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ESSAYS

Vol. II No. 2 August, 1989

BEHAVIORS, ATTITUDES AND KNOWLEDGE OF UNO STUDENTS REGARDING DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO: 1989

by David Hunnicutt and Joe Davis

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BEHAVIORS, ATTITUDES AND KNOWLEDGE OF UNO STUDENTS REGARDING DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO: 1989

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Introduction

Few institutions of higher education are free from the variety of problems — often costly ones — that arise from alcohol and drug abuse. Educational leaders concur that alcohol and drug abuse inhibits the educational development of college students and threatens the college's ability to perform its mission (Mills, Pfaffenberger & McCarty, 1981). Moreover, trends and patterns in college-student drinking are of concern for counselors, student personnel, clinicians, medical personnel, and scholars in the social sciences (Berkowitz & Perkins, 1987).

Perhaps no area has proved more clearly appropriate for the application of systematic research and reporting than the drug field, given its rapid rate of change, its importance for the well-being of the nation, and the amount of legislative and administrative intervention addressed to this issue. Young people are usually at the leading edge of social change; and this has been particularly true in the case of drug abuse. The massive upsurge in illicit drug use during the last 25 years has been primarily a youth phenomenon, with the onset of use most likely to occur during adolescence (Johnston, O'Malley & Bachman, 1987).

Thus, having an accurate assessment of the scope of drug use among students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha is a prerequisite for rational campus debate and policy-making decisions.

This 1989 research report describes alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use among University of Nebraska at Omaha students. The report focuses on drug use at the higher frequency levels, rather than reporting proportions who have ever used various drugs. This is an attempt to differentiate levels of a seriousness, or extent, of drug involvement. While there is no consensus as to what levels or patterns of use constitute "abuse," there is a consensus that higher levels of use are more likely than lower levels to have detrimental effects for the user and society.

The survey is part of a Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Educational Grant entitled LIFT-UP (Let's Intervene For Tomorrow — University Project). The purpose of this survey is to provide a current assessment and baseline date of UNO students' drug and alcohol use to administrators and educators charged with the responsibility of providing programs to college students, and to university policy makers concerned with the health and well-being of UNO students.

Research Design

The data were collected during the spring semester of 1989. A random sample of classes by call number was generated by Campus Computing. Correspondence was sent to the instructors of the selected classes requesting permission to administer the survey in a specific class, and permission was received from 90% of the instructors contacted. The questionnaires were administered in classrooms during the normal class period. The same administrative protocol was followed for each class.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTION OF POPULATION AND SAMPLE BY SEX, AGE, AND ENROLLMENT STATUS UNO

	Population		Sample		Percent Sampled
	N	%	N	%	
Sex					
Male	7517	47.2	349	48.9	**4.6%**
Female	8396	52.8	357	50	**4.3%**
Age					
21	3372	21.2	255	35.7	**7.6%**
21-30	8139	51.1	366	51.3	**4.9%**
31-40	3134	19.7	62	8.7	**2.0%**
41+	1268	8.0	24	3.4	**1.9%**
Hours					
12+	7460	46.8	562	78.7	**7.5%**
12	8453	53.1	139	19.5	**1.6%**

A total of 715 students completed the questionnaire. This represented 4.5% of the UNO student population during the spring 1989 semester. There may be a sampling error of plus or minus 4% at the .05 confidence level.

Table 1 depicts the sample used in this survey compared to the UNO student population, spring semester 1989. The sample accurately represents the sex difference in the student population and roughly approximates the age distribution. However, the sample is heavily weighted toward the full-time student and underrepresents the part-time student population at UNO.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this survey was originally developed by Dr. David Corbin. The questionnaire format was revised to facilitate ease of student response. In addition, questions from the "Monitoring The Future" study (1987) conducted by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan, Ruth Eng's and David Hanson's "Trends in College Students' Drinking Problems Since 1982" (1986), and the Centers for Disease Control's Drug and Alcohol Abuse Evaluation Handbooks (1988) were added. The additional questions allowed for comparisons to national responses.

The separate classes of drugs distinguished in this report are alcohol, tobacco, cocaine, marijuana and non-prescription "stay-awake" pills. In addition to the section concerning use, there are sections which address negative consequences of drinking, perceptions of close friends concerning alcohol and drug use, perceived risk of becoming an alcoholic, and personal knowledge of alcohol and drugs. The questionnaire format and protocol were approved by the Institutional Review Board on July 21, 1988 (IRB F 533-88).

Validity

A question of validity arises regarding responses to questions dealing with sensitive behaviors such as drug use. As with most studies dealing with sensitive behaviors, there is no direct, objective validation of the responses. In this study the researchers attempted to create a situation and follow a set of procedures in which student confidentiality was evident. In addition, the researchers presented a case as to why the data were needed. The researchers are confident that a high level of validity has been obtained. Nevertheless, insofar as there exists some reporting bias, it would seem to be in the direction of underreporting. Thus, the data gathered from this sample may result in lower values than actually exists, based upon work done by Johnston, O'Malley & Bachman (1987). In addition, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was checked by comparing student responses to similar questions.

Major Findings

Alcohol. Alcohol is by far the most frequently and heavily used of the drugs discussed in this report. Use of alcohol is common across all age groups. Table 2 shows the percentage of respondents who had used alcohol during the last 12 months and during the last 30 days. A sizable percentage of UNO students surveyed report frequent alcohol use (10 or more times within the last 30 days). Indeed, 16% of males and 9.5% of females under the age of 21 reported consuming alcohol 10 or more times during the last 30 days. Likewise, 17.2% of males and 10.7% of females between the ages of 21 and 30 reported consuming alcohol 10 or more times in the last 30 days.

TABLE 2
ALCOHOL USE

Age	Under 21		21-30		31-40		41+	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Percent who have drunk alcohol during:								
...the last 12 months	84.1%*	91.3%	89.3%	89.9%	68.5%	86.0%	71.5%	82.4%
...the last 30 days	68.8	70.1	79.7	75.1	63.2	61.5	28.6	47.1
Frequency of use during the last 30 days:								
0 times	31.2	29.9	20.3	24.9	36.8	39.5	71.4	52.9
1-2 times	16.8	34.6	16.8	32.0	36.8	27.9	14.3	23.5
3-5 times	24.0	18.1	28.4	20.1	5.3	16.3	14.3	11.8
6-9 times	12.0	7.9	17.3	12.4	5.3	9.3	0.0	0.0
10-19 times	10.4	8.7	10.7	8.9	5.3	4.7	0.0	5.9
20-39 times	3.2	0.0	5.0	1.8	10.5	2.3	0.0	0.0
40+ times	2.4	.8	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.9
N=	125	127	197	169	19	43	7	17

*Percentages refer to % of entire age-sex group.

Five or More Drinks in a Row. Table 3 shows the percentage of respondents who had five or more drinks within the last two weeks and the percentage who did not have five or more drinks in the last two weeks. The table also depicts the frequency of use during the past two weeks. Over 50% of male students under the age of 31 reported consuming at least five drinks in a row within the past two weeks; 29% of the females in this age group had also consumed at least five drinks in a row. According to the Nebraska Prevention Center for Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Technical Report 19 (1989), this level of consumption predicts a blood alcohol level of more than 0.10 — the level at which normal physical and mental processes become problematic; it is the legal definition of intoxication. The widespread extent of risk drinking among UNO students is without question one of the more significant findings of this survey.

Drinking to Get Drunk. Most studies (Berkowitz & Perkins, 1987) conclude that men are more likely to engage in escapist behavior or drunkeness than women, who commonly report drinking for a social

TABLE 3
FIVE OR MORE DRINKS IN A ROW

Age	Under 21		21-30		31-40		41+	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Percent who have had five or more drinks in a row within the last two weeks:								
...Did have five or more drinks in a row	54.0%*	29.1%	50.3%	29.0%	21.1%	4.7%	14.3%	11.8%
...Did not have five or more drinks in a row	46.0	70.9	49.7	71.0	78.9	95.3	85.7	88.2
Frequency during the last two weeks:								
Once	19.0	9.4	13.2	13.6	10.5	2.3	14.3	11.8
Twice	16.7	6.3	11.2	5.3	5.3	2.3	0.0	0.0
3-5 times	11.1	11.0	16.8	8.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
6-9 times	3.2	0.0	5.1	0.6	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
10 or more times	4.0	2.4	4.1	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
N=	126	127	197	169	19	43	7	17

*Percentages refer to % of entire age-sex group.

outlet. The findings of the survey support the previous findings. Table 4 shows how often UNO students reported drinking to get drunk. Of the males, 52.3% under the age of 21 reported that they at least occasionally drink to get drunk, and 25.3%of those respondents reported they drink to get drunk at least half of the time. In addition, 39.4% of the females under the age of 21 occasionally drink to get drunk.

TABLE 4
DRINKING TO GET DRUNK*

Age	Under 21		21-30		31-40		41+	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Percent who, when they consume alcohol, drink to get drunk:								
...I did not drink in the last month	31.0%	32.3%	18.4%	29.0%	42.1%	37.2%	57.1%	47.1%
...None of the time	16.7	28.3	41.3	43.2	42.1	55.8	42.9	47.1
...Occasionally	27.0	25.2	25.0	20.1	10.5	7.0	0.0	0.0
...Half of the time	11.1	5.5	3.6	4.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
...Most of the time	6.3	6.3	9.7	3.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.9
...All of the time	7.9	2.4	2.0	0.0	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
N=	126	127	196	169	19	43	7	17

*Percentages refer to % of entire age-sex group.

It should be noted that the frequency of drinking (Table 2), the amount consumed per occasion (Table 3), and the percentage of those drinking to get drunk (Table 4) are indications that there are specific areas of concern that need to be addressed.

Driving After Using Drugs or Alcohol Because it is a commuter campus, with average student age of 27, UNO students rely heavily on the use of automobiles for transportation. Table 5 shows the percentage of UNO students who report driving after using drugs or alcohol

TABLE 5
DRIVING AFTER USING DRUGS OR ALCOHOL*

Age	Under 21		21-30		31-40		41+	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Percent who have driven an automobile after using drugs or alcohol during:								
...the last 12 months	64.8%	63.8%	74.5%	62.1%	36.8%	35.7%	42.9%	35.3%
...the last 30 days	44.4	29.1	60.2	34.3	15.8	20.9	28.6	17.6
Frequency during the last 30 days:								
0 times	55.6	70.1	39.8	65.7	84.2	79.1	71.4	14.0
1-2 times	23.4	18.4	35.7	21.9	15.8	16.3	28.6	1.0
3-5 times	10.5	4.7	11.2	5.9	0.0	4.7	0.0	2.0
6-9 times	3.2	2.4	6.6	4.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
10-19 times	4.8	1.6	5.6	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
20-39 times	2.4	1.6	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
40+ times	0.0	0.8	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
N=	124	127	196	169	19	43	7	17

*Percentages refer to % of entire age-sex group.

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The Editor

University of Nebraska at Omaha

Educational and Student Services
University of Nebraska at Omaha

quencies of "stay-awake" pills suggests that they are frequently not used.

Personal Knowledge of Alcohol and Drugs. The final section of the questionnaire was a 10-item test of the respondents' knowledge regarding drug, alcohol and tobacco use. These items were taken from the Centers For Disease Control's Alcohol & Drug Abuse Education Evaluation Handbooks (1988).

UNO respondents under the age of 21 had a mean score of 76.09% correct; respondents aged 21 to 30 had a mean score of 76.6%; respondents aged 31 to 40 had a mean score of 76.97%; and respondents aged 41 and older had a mean score of 77.06%.

It is interesting to note that, although the UNO survey respondents possess significant knowledge concerning drugs and alcohol, they still choose to engage in risky behaviors.

National Norms. Table 7 compares UNO student findings with a national sample of college students surveyed in 1986 in select categories of substance use. The national figures were published in "Illicit Drug Use, Smoking and Drinking by America's High School Students, College Students and Young Adults 1975-1986."

These comparisons are from different time periods, but they use the most current national data available. The UNO data were collected in the spring of 1989, and the U.S. data in 1986. In the national study, college students are defined as those who are 19 to 22 years of age who said that they were registered as full-time students at the beginning of March in the year in question, and who said that they were enrolled in a two- or four-year college.

Tables 7 and 8 compare UNO students' reported drug and alcohol use with national findings in select categories. Interestingly, the UNO students surveyed are below the national average in terms of select drug use categories, except in the category of smoking a half a pack of cigarettes or more per day.

TABLE 8
DRINKING FIVE OR MORE DRINKS IN A ROW IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS: UNO STUDENTS COMPARED TO NATIONAL AVERAGE

	UNO	National
Drinking five or more drinks in a row in the last two weeks	37%	45%
N=	706	1190

Conclusions

Although UNO students are well below the national average in terms of drug use, the problem of alcohol abuse — the reason for drinking, the frequency of drinking, the amount consumed per occasion, drinking and driving and drinking and riding — is still of disturbing proportions. What seems to be accepted as normal alcohol consumption by UNO students is, for the most part, very heavy use.

The consequences of drug and alcohol use are enormous for both students and the institution. Most college students have a very high tolerance for alcohol-related abusive behavior. Getting drunk three nights a week is readily accepted as normal by many students. "Blacking out" is frequently the cause of great attention and celebration. Making it back safely, after having driven while intoxicated, is often viewed as no big deal when safety was actually in serious jeopardy.

Additionally, most students are woefully ignorant of the warning signs of alcohol abuse. Many assume they are experts about alcohol because they drink so much of it. However, this has been changing as a result of drug and alcohol education programs. Still, the majority of college students do not know or understand the drug they are using.

Professionals involved in higher education must assign high priority to the problem of alcohol and drug abuse among college students. For many, the college years are when individuals make decisions about drug and alcohol use which will influence the rest of their lives. Therefore, it is extremely important those decisions be sound ones. The ultimate victory over drug and alcohol abuse among college students will be achieved when individuals apply their creativity and commit resources to effectively addressing this issue.

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Joe L. Davis, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Educational and Student Services and Editor

in the past 12 months and the past 30 days. Table 5 also shows the frequency of this behavior during the past 30 days.

It is alarming to note the high incidence across all age groups of driving after using drugs or alcohol. Most notably, 20.4% of the males under the age of 21 and 24.4% of the males 21 to 30 years of age reported engaging in this behavior three or more times in the last 30 days. The high incidence of drinking and driving is clearly the most alarming finding in this report. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation (1988), the alcohol-related traffic fatality is the number one cause of death for those 16 to 24 years of age.

Riding With a Driver Who has Used Drugs or Alcohol The data presented in Table 6 shows the percentage of UNO students who, within the last 12 months and the last 30 days, had ridden with a driver who had used drugs or alcohol. Table 6 also shows the frequency of this behavior during the past 30 days. It should be noted that 21.6% of males under the age of 21 and 28.5% of males 21 to 30 have engaged in this risky behavior three or more times in the last 30 days. Interestingly, female respondents report somewhat more responsible drinking habits than their male counterparts (Tables 3, 4 and 5), but frequently ride with a drinking or drugged driver. In fact, approximately 42% of females aged 30 and under had ridden with a drinking or drugged driver one or more times in the last 30 days.

TABLE 6
RIDING WITH A DRIVER WHO HAS USED DRUGS OR ALCOHOL*

Age	Under 21		21-30		31-40		41+	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Percent who have ridden with a driver who had used drugs or alcohol during:								
...the last 12 months	61.9%	75.2%	74.0%	68.6%	36.8%	44.2%	57.1%	64.7%
...the last 30 days	41.6	41.7	54.3	42.0	10.5	23.3	42.9	25.0
Frequency during the last 30 days:								
0 times	58.4	58.3	45.7	58.0	89.5	76.7	57.1	75.0
1-2 times	20.0	25.2	25.9	24.9	10.5	18.6	42.9	12.5
3-5 times	8.0	8.7	13.7	7.7	0.0	2.3	0.0	12.5
6-9 times	4.8	4.7	8.1	5.9	0.0	2.3	0.0	0.0
10-19 times	7.2	1.6	4.7	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
20-39 times	1.6	1.6	1.5	.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
40+ times	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
N=	125	127	197	169	19	43	7	16

*Percentages refer to % of entire age-sex group.

Possession, Consumption and Intoxication on Campus. Only a small percentage of UNO students reported illegally possessing, consuming or being intoxicated from alcohol or drugs on the university campus. Approximately 3% of male respondents reported illegally consuming alcohol or illegal drugs on campus in the last 30 days. Less than 1% of females reported illegally consuming alcohol or drugs on campus in the last 30 days.

In addition, only 3.5% of males reported being intoxicated on campus in the last 30 days. Likewise, only a very small percentage (approximately 2%) of female respondents reported engaging in this behavior. Only 5.8% of male respondents reported possessing alcohol or illegal drugs on campus in the last 30 days, as compared to only 2.2% of female respondents.

Thus, possession or consumption of or intoxication from illegal drugs or alcohol does not appear to be a large problem on the UNO campus.

Tobacco. UNO female respondents reported higher levels of regular smoking than their male counterparts. Indeed, 11.5% of females reported smoking a half a pack or more per day, as compared to 8.6% of male respondents. These results are consistent with the findings of Johnston et al. (1987) for college females in general. Clearly, chewing tobacco is an established male phenomenon: 5.2% of male respondents reported chewing a few times per day.

Drug Use. Drug use at UNO does not appear to be a large problem when compared to national findings. Only 11.1% of the UNO survey respondents reported having used marijuana in the last 30 days, as compared to 22.3% in national studies of college students (Table 7). The 30-day use findings further suggest that marijuana is not used as frequently. In addition, only 4.2% of the respondents reported using cocaine in the last 30 days. Twenty-two percent of the UNO respndents reported using non-prescription "stay-awake" pills in the last 30 days. However, the 30-day use fre-

TABLE 7
UNO STUDENTS USE OF SELECT DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO DURING THE LAST 12 MONTHS AND THE LAST 30 DAYS COMPARED TO 1986 NATIONAL AVERAGES

	12 Months		30 Days	
	UNO	National	UNO	National
Alcohol	89.1%	91.5%	72.3%	79.7%
Marijuana	24.8%	40.9%	11.1%	22.3%
Cocaine	7.8%	17.1%	4.2%	7.0%
Tobacco (½ pack/day+)	NA	NA	9.9%	8.3%
N=	706	1190	706	1190